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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
Thirteenth session
17 January-4 February 1994

DRAFT REPORT OF WORKING GROUP III

Follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights and input to the International Conference on Population and Development

1. The Working Group was established on an exceptional basis in the view of the heavy programme of work of the Committee at its current session. It was composed of Zagorka Ilic (Chairperson), Merwat Tallawy, Kongit Sinegiorgis, Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling, Silvia Rose Cartwright (Rapporteur), Ivanka Corti, Norma Monica Forde and Rose Ukeje.

2. The Working Group was assigned the task of preparing the Committee's contribution to the follow-up to the World Conference on Human Rights and to the International Conference on Population and Development.

3. On the basis of its analysis, the Working Group recommends that the Committee adopt the following decisions and recommendations.

I. FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

A. Plan of activities of the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat

The Committee, having been provided by the Centre for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat with a draft of the latter's plan of activities for the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, recommends that the plan of activities be amended in order to strengthen the Centre's work relating to the human rights of women and its relations with the Committee. It decides that these amendments should be transmitted by the Chairperson of the Committee to the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights of the United Nations Secretariat.

B. Feasibility of preparing an optional protocol to the Convention

The Committee takes note that the World Conference on Human Rights recommended that:

"New procedures should also be adopted to strengthen implementation of the commitment to women's equality and the human rights of women. The Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should quickly examine the possibility of introducing the right of petition through the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ..." 1/ and on the basis of its discussion, it recommends:

SUGGESTION NO. 5

(1) The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommends that the Commission on the Status of Women request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to convene an expert group meeting to prepare a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women providing for a complaints procedure. The Expert Group would be composed of 5 to 10 independent experts with a knowledge of the different forms of civilization and the principal legal systems.

(2) The Expert Group meeting would be convened during 1994. Upon the nomination of the experts by the Secretary-General, the secretariat of the Division for the Advancement of Women will seek written suggestions from the independent experts as to the elements which the optional protocol should comprise. The secretariat will, from these suggestions, compile a working document, which will be circulated to the experts prior to their meeting.

(3) The Committee will appoint one of its members to participate in the preliminary exchange of suggestions and in the compilation of the working document. That member will also participate in the Expert Group meeting.

(4) The report of the Expert Group meeting will be presented first to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for its comment and then to the Commission on the Status of Women for action.

1/ A/CONF.157/23, para. 40.

II. INPUT TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

SUGGESTION NO. 6

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling that International Conference on Population and Development is being held at an important moment in a time of profound political, economic, social and cultural change, that it comes also at a time when it is beginning to be recognized that the role of both men and women is the central force in sustainable development, that women constitute the majority of the world population and that the interdependence of their status with economic growth, the elimination of poverty, sustainable development and population issues has been affirmed,

Noting that the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action state that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and that the full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community,

Bearing in mind that the Charter of the United Nations reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women,

Recalling that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields,

1. Reiterates the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women noting the great contribution of women to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, so far not fully recognized, the social significance of maternity and the role of both parents in the family and in the upbringing of children, and that the role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination but that the upbringing of children requires a sharing of responsibility between men and women and society as a whole, and reaffirms the rights of both parents to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;

2. Notes that there is a vicious circle of women's illiteracy, poverty, fertility rates and discrimination in formal and informal employment, as well as an interrelation of these issues with population and development issues and that due attention must therefore be given to this interdependence in any population and development policies as well as to allowing women equal participation in the relevant governmental and non-governmental decision-making processes;

3. Reaffirms the objective of the International Conference on Population and Development to raise the quality of life for all people, notably through the guarantee of human rights, the alleviation of poverty, the creation of employment in the formal and informal sectors and the improvement of health, education, nutrition and housing and considers that, as women are generally the poorest of the poor, eliminating social, cultural, economic and political discrimination against women is a prerequisite for attaining the human rights of women and for enhancing the quality of life of the people, as well as reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and achieving sound population policies;

4. Recognizes that, in view of the increase in the number of female-headed households, special measures should be carried out to provide for the special needs of female-headed families and that due attention should be paid to them in all aspects of population and development policies;

5. Strongly emphasizes that one of the main objectives of the International Conference is to eliminate discrimination against the girl child and increase public awareness of her value, both before and after her birth; to eliminate the root causes of preferences for sons; and to strengthen the girl child's self-image and self-esteem and improve the status of the girl child, especially with regard to health, nutrition and education;

6. Recommends that, in the formulation of sustainable development policies, particularly in poor rural and urban areas, the needs and tasks of women, especially in terms of their impact on natural resources, should be recognized and that women should participate in governmental and non-governmental decision-making processes on these issues on equal terms with men;

7. Notes women's contribution as unpaid workers in the home as well as their income-generating role in the informal sector, and considers that due attention should be paid to the recognition of the value of this work in research as well as in calculating gross national product, which forms the basis of development and population policies and programmes, as well as to the elimination of all discriminatory practices impeding women's work in these areas when formulating development and population policies;

8. Also notes that the severe economic situation facing many nations, both developed and developing, as well as structural adjustment programmes and the concomitant reduction in social programmes, have serious implications for the people, particularly at the grass-roots level where women constitute the majority and who suffer disproportionally from this transition and adjustment period, and calls for appropriate measures to be carried out by Governments and international agencies to alleviate the burden imposed in the life of men and women and their families in this respect.